



SONDY POPE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE
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Rep. Pope's Column: DPI offers proactive proposals in stark contrast with Gov. Walker's shortsighted, callous approach to public schools.

In his February 3 budget address, Governor Scott Walker touted successes for Wisconsin's students and education. He noted that, "our graduation rates are higher, third grade reading scores are better, and Wisconsin ACT scores are second best in the country." Now with the cameras off, Walker is taking a jackhammer to the very schools that created the statistics he conveniently rolls out for speeches.

For quite some time, Republican legislators have been applying circular logic to education – setting up public schools for failure by continuing to starve them of resources, and instead providing opportunity to for-profit institutions. In Gov. Walker's proposed budget, the most concerning cuts involve public education – not only because of the massive reductions schools may have to absorb, but because Walker's policies demonstrate shortsighted, punitive thinking and a fundamental lack of understanding about the purpose of an education.

Walker's budget proposal involves cutting \$150 in per pupil spending. Across Wisconsin, with over 70 percent of school-age children attending public schools, this adds up to \$126 million dollars. In every school district, these cuts will invariably affect the quality of resources schools can provide to their students.

On the surface, cuts to any program seem like feasible solutions to Walker's budget deficit. The more he cuts, the more he has to throw at his budget hole. However, programs like education require long-term investments to see pay-offs. Cutting funding from education – while it may place a temporary Band-Aid on the problem Walker created – will only create damaging effects for the next generation of Wisconsin workers and leaders.

Other concerning proposals from Walker's budget include altering teacher licensing requirements, allocating more funding to unaccountable voucher programs, and eliminating the power of locally-elected school boards.

In a public hearing on Thursday, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) put forth a number of proposals that offered a stark contrast to Gov. Walker's budget. Instead of making cuts left-and-right, DPI highlighted areas of growth for public schools – including proactive strategies for success. While Gov. Walker's proposal would allow anyone with a bachelor's degree to become

a teacher, DPI offered a higher-quality approach. Highlighted was the importance of experience in teacher licensing, noting that minimum requirements of simply 100 hours of pedagogical experience is nowhere near enough to ensure high standards for teachers. DPI also explained the most basic principle governing strict teacher licensure requirements: the higher the standards for teachers, the better students perform. Across the country, more rigorous teaching standards produced higher ACT scores.

As a longtime supporter of public education, and ranking member of the Assembly Committee on Education, I am shocked to see how little importance is being placed on education in our state today. It surprises me that 45 out of 63 Republican Representatives so quickly forget that they too were byproducts of Wisconsin public education, and are so willing to callously demolish the system that once supported them. Every legislator, current student, and Wisconsinite who attended our strong public schools knows how a quality educator, class, or academic opportunity can impact your future.

Education provides the building blocks for our children's futures, and without resources the quality of education we can provide to our students declines greatly. I urge all concerned citizens to contact your legislators and local media to voice your views on these proposals, and I urge all legislators who value our state's future to stand opposed to Walker's education proposals, and to prioritize proactive, forward-thinking opportunities for our students.

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